

Representation of Feminine Redemption of Ganga in Sudha Murty's *the Maiden of the River*

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ABSTRACT

The daughter from a Wishing Tree, written by Sudha Murty, a novelist and short story writer from Shiggao (a village in Karnataka), was released in 2019. Stories of Indian mythological goddesses served as inspiration for this book. The protagonist of the story *The Maiden of the River* is Ganga. The paper's main theme is the redemption of Ganga as a mother and a woman, and it demonstrates how she was connected to the sage *Durvasa* (later became *Shantanu*), *Bhagiratha*, *Bhishma*. It also demonstrates how she establishes a personal connection with humanity.

KEYWORDS: *Femininity, Receptiveness, Motherhood, Purity, Cleanser, Goddess*

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INTRODUCTION

"Femininity is defined in various dictionaries in either a circular manner as the quality of being feminine or indirectly as qualities associated with the female sex. (Clare M. Mehta) Passivity, submission, tenderness, warmth, helpfulness, compassion, understanding, reliance, emotional expressiveness, and the maternal instinct are examples of feminine traits and characteristics. These feminine characteristics have been labelled as relational or communal characteristics. Connecting with, supporting, and caring for others is thus a crucial aspect of femininity. (Clare M. Mehta)

Millions of people have relied on the River Ganges (also known as Ganga) as a source of food, a sign of belief, hope, heritage, and peace from the dawn of time. She is the centre of social and religious legacy in the Indian subcontinent, and Hinduism holds a unique reverence for her. (Kumar)

The river is also referred to as "the lifeline of India" since it offers a diverse range of services, including the transitions from water to food, energy to

ecological, lives to livelihoods, social issues to economics, and cultural considerations to spirituality. (Kumar)

Hinduism attributes water with the ability to "produce, regenerate, perpetuate, and protect life," (Bosch) among other valuable qualities. Water includes *amrita*, or the life elixir in addition to conferring wisdom, fortune, progeny, granting prayers, and guarding against demons and powers of darkness. Since Hinduism's mythology and tradition have long emphasised the significance and sacredness of water, it is essential to the religion's current religious and cultural practises. Although we all know that water is the basis of life, Ganges water is the source of life eternal. (Rao)

River Ganga in the story 'The Maiden of the River' in the book 'The Daughter from a Wishing Tree' is presented as a feminine gender. It shows, how Ganga as a feminine identity takes in all the dirt and evil of the society like a mother does for her child. "Motherhood taught me something new about love. It

was the one relationship where you gave everything you had and then wished you had more to give.” narrates Sita. (Divakurni)

Sudha Murty's works revolve around her personal experiences and observations throughout her life. Her works mainly talk about the empowerment of women and how they get to identify themselves and become independent in their journey of life. This research paper focuses on the “Representation of Feminine Redemption of Ganga in Sudha Murty's *The Maiden of the River*”.

OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This paper discusses how Ganga as a taker of sin is present in instances in the story *The Maiden of the River* in the book *The Daughter from a Wishing Tree* (2019). The work is examined through textual analysis as the methodology and study seeks to identify in the story instances that validate the presence of Ganga as a Receptor of Evil and the role she plays for humanity. Objective is to show that how mythology is deeply connected to the social feminist structure at present.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary text taken into reflection is the story *The Maiden of the river* in Sudha Murty's book *The Daughter from a Wishing Tree* (2019). The novel revolves around the stories of multiple goddesses in Indian Mythology, in which one of them is Ganga represented as a personification of female identity and receptor of evil in the story *Maiden of the River*.

Variety of secondary texts discussing the works of Sudha Murty are taken into consideration as well to show the discourse and ideologies in her works with relation to feminism or feminine identity.

“Patriarchal Dubiousness in Sudha Murty's *House of Cards: An Overview*” (2015) by Dr. Jabeen R. Siddiqui points out how the females are manipulated and dominated in this male dominant society. Mridula always saves money and doesn't spend much to ensure a secure and harmonious future, but Sanjay has completely manipulated her due to her lack of understanding of love and trust. He has given his mother lakhs of money. He spends money on his sister and nephew. A marriage is destroyed by heartless judgement, manipulation, and power. Sanjay succumbed to his mother's and sister's selfishness. He had opened a joint fixed deposit account with his sister without informing his wife. After achieving success with the assistance of his wife, He cheated and dominated his wife with his 'dubious nature', and Mridula was puzzled that she had not received a good reward for saving for the future. It demonstrates infidelity by cheating the wife financially. This article

focuses on breach of trust made by Sanjay in his wife Mridula.

"The Social and Ethical Values in the Select Novels of Sudha Murty" (2019) by Rimah Saleh Alyahya. The main purpose of this paper is to study the struggles faced by the protagonists in the select novels of Sudha Murty. The study of the protagonists Shrimati, Mridula, Anupama, in the novels '*Gently Falls the Bakula*', '*House of Cards*' and '*Mahashweta*' are victims in marriage life, goes through various ups and downs and overcomes their barriers in order to lead and live a meaningful life for themselves.

"Rejection Leads to Revolution of Protagonist in Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula*" (2016) S. Parvathi and Dr S.K.Pushpalatha. Shrimati falls in love with her neighbour Shrikant and marries, but her mother-in-law treats her poorly and demands money afterwards. Her husband later rejects her as well after a white patch is discovered on her body called Vitiligo. She became an efficient secretary for him in the housekeeping department, regardless of her goals. Shrikant never understands her sacrifice for his success. Shrikant didn't care about her and was only interested in his ambitions. His secretary at the office had schedules as well, but Shrimati's job was full-time. Shrikant never acknowledged Shrimati's contribution to his success, and she suffered from loneliness all the time. So, she tries to look beyond his husband and eventually decides to pursue a Ph.D., which she eventually achieves against all odds and moves to make her own individuality. The current paper explains how the modern world's rejected woman becomes a revolutionary woman.

"Quest for Identity in Sudha Murty's *Dollar Bahu and Mahashweta*" (2020) by Pooja Rajesh Nichole 'Dollar Bahu' and 'Mahashweta' are not just the characters, but also portrayals of our society, which constantly attempts to limit so-called 'second sex'. The conservative society based on male dominance is dubious. However, the journey from repression and melancholy to liberty, empowerment, making a decision is both provocative and ground-breaking.

“Female Protagonists in the Selected Stories in '*The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk*' by Sudha Murty" (2017) by Dr. P. N Meshram is a collection of true stories. The author writes about her personal observations and experiences. She works for the betterment of society and rural development, and her goal is to provide Computer education and a library to government schools. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the selected stories of Sudha Murty and predicament, as well as how they overcame their dilemmas in their lives. The stories that follow Chitra, the female protagonist who overcomes her

predicament and becomes a successful lady. Hindu Kashibai - the female protagonist - had accepted and raised Muslim Rahman with his own religious practice and still embraced him as if he were her son. Despite her lack of education, Kashibai is a true humanitarian. Ganga, a coolie in a small village in a drought-stricken area who provides bathing water to hundreds of people, becomes the female protagonist. The wife of the hut owner- the female protagonist-taught Sudha Murty a lesson, and her ignorance of the economic situation of the poor people in the waterlogged village changed her mind, and she resolved on that day to stop drinking milk.

“Educating Women for Emancipation and Cultural Empowerment: A Critical Study of Sudha Murty's *Three Thousand Stitches*” (2020) by Dr. P Venkata Ravi Kumar, Kola Aravind, Dr. Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu and Yash Raj. The current story, *Three Thousand Stitches*, revolves around the miserable lives of women caught up in the *devadasi* system and prostitution. The story demonstrates how education, as a crucial tool in those women's liberation and empowerment, was magnified. The following story is an excerpt from the book *Here, There, and Everywhere: Best Loved Stories*. Sudha Murty speaks out against the subjection and inadequate position of women in our country, emphasising the importance of education in empowering helpless women to become self-sufficient. The story depicts women who practise the *devdasi* system and are separated from their families and temple divinities, as well as being sexually exploited by men in authority.

"The Evolution of a New Woman in the Sudha Murty's Novel *Mahashweta*" (2016) by S.Parvathi, Dr. S. K. Pushpalatha in Sudha Murty's novel *Mahashweta* depicts the development of a new woman. With the advent of freedom, particularly India's national struggle, the position of women improved. It became clear that as long as women in the country were not uplifted or given equal status with men in all walks of life-political, social, economic, and educational-India would be unable to progress or make significant advances in any field. Our women play an important role in the advancement of our country because their mental and physical contact with life is much longer and more comprehensive than that of men. The current paper elucidates various ideas prevalent in orthodox Indian society as well as the conscientious firmness of a new Indian woman.

“The Forest of Enchantments”(2019) a book by an award-winning author Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reexamines the Ramayana's story from Sita's perspective. It provides new insight into a well-

known Hindu epic and makes an effort to explore the idea of female autonomy in a patriarchal society.

“Pleasers to Rejectors of patriarchy: understanding nature in Pattanaik's works” (2020) by Vidya Shankar Shetty, Dr. Payal Dutta Choudhury. The article weaves together the stories of the rivers, with a particular emphasis on the Ganga, the stories of the celestial beings, with a particular emphasis on the constellations, and the stories of plants, with a particular emphasis on the Tulsi plant, which has a feminine form,

“Devlok” (2019) by Devdutt Pattanaik. The book is based on a well-liked Devdutt Pattanaik television programme. It contains information on all facets of Hindu tradition in the book. The concepts of heaven and hell, the Gita, Shiv, Ganesha, weapons, colours, and many other subjects are all beautifully described in the book. The eternal cycle of life has been made clear by the author. As the book goes on, it provides you with in-depth details about fascinating mythological facts.

“Ganges in Indian Sculpture and Literature: Mythology and Personification” (2022) by Nalini Rao, using art historical and archaeological evidence, the paper examines the development of the idea of the sacredness and eternity of the Ganges. It looks into its various personas and intricate personifications in Hindu mythology, as well as their development in Sanskrit literature and representation in stone sculpture.

“River Ganges – Historical, cultural and Socioeconomic attributes” (2017) by Dilip Kumar. This article makes an effort to provide a macro perspective of the Ganges and a wider context that includes its historical, spiritual, cultural, and socioeconomic attributes and considerations, which frequently go unmentioned in scientific papers.

“(Im)Purifying Ganga: Ecospiritual reading of Raj Kapoor's Ram Teri Ganga Maili” (2015) by Dr. Ajay S. Deshmukh. This paper reflects includes one the great works by the legendary director Raj Kapoor sir who presented “Ganga” as a symbolism who struggled throughout her life because of the norms and orthodoxy of upper society citizens. Ganga here is personified by Raj Kapoor in the movie. Throughout the paper, author has given stances from the movie how she has been criticised for sins of others, which is significant story narrated by Sudha Murty in her chapter of *the Maiden of the River* where Sage Durvasa after his curse, blessed her by saying people of Kalyug will take a dip in your serene water to cleanse their sins.

“Ganga River: A Paradox of Purity and Pollution in India due to Unethical Practice” (2020) by D C Jhariya and Anoop Kumar Tiwari. The Ganga River holds a unique place in India’s culture. Based on the Scriptures, the river evolved from King Bhagirath’s long and tedious prayers for the salvation of his dead ancestors. From heaven to earth the Ganga has been India’s river of faith, devotion, and worship since ancient times. Millions of Hindus regard it as a sacred river. Even today, people from all over the country and abroad bring *Gangajal* with them because it is “holy” water with “restorative” properties. Despite our reverence for the river, its condition is deteriorating, and we Indians are powerless to keep it pure, which is here justified in the chapter of *The Maiden of the River* where king Shantanu was a Jackal in his past life, he was killed and burnt by a sage, he ensured that the jackal’s ashes must be immersed in the river.

DISCUSSION

Motherhood is often represented as a social responsibility of a women, safeguarding and keeping her family into protection. She takes all the blames on her, for the problems of the welfare of her child, husband, father rather the whole family. For a mother, her entire world revolves around her family and that what femininity represents as a social construct and in oral mythological traditions as well. Ganga also known as Ma Ganga in this context, can be clearly seen carrying out her motherly obligations towards her offspring. She doesn’t make a distinction between her children or treat them differently. She views everyone as her own children, regardless of race, religion, age, or status. Like a child, who keeps faith in her mother, her mother doesn't let his faith down. The same way Ganga is an emotion, faith and more like a mother-child relationship with humanity in Indian mythology. She pours out all the negativity of her children into her so that her children must know all the peace.

From a feministic perspective, Ganga represents emancipation of women in society as a fighter and an expression of freedom. Even though Ganga is blocked with trash, she is unconstrained and flows in the direction of peoples' feelings of happiness. It can be interpreted as the way in which women are oppressed and make sacrifices in society while still pursuing their goals and fulfilling their societal and familial obligations.

Ma Ganga is one of the sacred and worshipped rivers in our country. There are many stories revolved around how Ganga originated from mythological perspective and one of them is, when Vishnu took the avatar of *Vamana* and asked the emperor Bali for

three feet land. The emperor agreeing upon the same, told him to take each step of same size. *Vamana* enlarged in size, became a giant called *Trivikarma*. With his first foot he covered the Earth, in his second, inhabited the Heaven, with his third foot, he pushed *Bali* down to rule the netherworld called *Paatal Lok*. Meanwhile, *Brahma*, the trinity in the heavens glances at and recognizes *Vishnu*’s feet and grabs the opportunity to puja. He takes out water from his *kamandalu* and washes his lord's feet. Once he spills, water started to flow on the Earth and that is why it is considered to be holy and named *Deva Ganga*. Another says that sage *Durvasa* was taking a bath in Ganga in the heavens and all of a sudden a rush of breeze blew away his clothes at which Ganga laughed. Raging *Durvasa* cursed her over her behaviour to reside with the humans. Ganga realized her pitiful act and apologized but once a curse is given it couldn't be changed said *Durvasa*. However, he gives her an exceptional power of cleansing others sins whoever takes a bathe in it. (Murty)

Geographically speaking, the Ganges River begins in the Himalayan mountains in *Gomukh*, where the *Gangotri* Glacier terminates. When this glacier's ice melts, it creates the clean waters of the *Bhagirathi* River. The *Bhagirathi* River meets the *Alaknanda* River as it runs down the Himalayas, forming the Ganges River. (Society)

Ganga is personified as a woman. The river is always given a ‘feminine’ role in Indian mythology. “She is at once revered and at the same time excluded from complete freedom. The river is the nurturer like the mother who rears and oversees the welfare of mankind”. (Vidya Shankar Shetty) “She is described as a very beautiful woman, voluptuous and fecund, carrying a water pot, *ghada*, in one hand. She is also depicted in the symbol of *Makara rashi*, Capricorn. The *Makara*, a sea creature with the tail of a fish and the head of an elephant, is her vehicle. Rationalists say the creature is probably the indigenous dolphin found in the Ganga, which is now an endangered species.” (Vidya Shankar Shetty) (Patnaik) Sudha Murty has justified how *ganga* is a feminine gender using “she” in this particular story.

This paper explains how Ganga is portrayed not only as a feminine identity but also as the recipient of evil in the story *The Maiden of the River* in the book *The Daughter from a Wishing Tree* by Sudha Murty. Ganges is considered such a holy place in Indian mythology that people come all the way from their homes to worship her. It probably enhances one’s spiritual journey and growth as crowd find peace and satisfaction in visiting her. Ganga, as a mother, absorbs all of humanity’s filth and evil, treating them

as her own children. Justified by one of the stories- A tale centres on *Bhagirath*, the king of Uttar Pradesh's *Kosala*. the legendary ruler of the Sun Dynasty. was incredibly wise, upright, and compassionate. He was a kind ruler who always adhered to the *Dharma*. He once misplaced the white horse sacrificed during the *Ashvamedha Yagya*. He asks thousands of sons of Sumati to bring him the horse. Princes arrived on Earth looking for horse. They, while crossing a forest destroyed all the people and things there. They arrived at the location where the sage *Kapila* was meditating. He had a white horse tacked up behind him. The princes mistook the sage for a thief and attacked him, but sage *Kapila's* yogic abilities helped him to reduce the princes to ashes. Only by floating their ashes over the Ganga, who was flowing in heaven, was it possible to regain immortality or experience birth in heaven (*Swarga*). To grant his ancestors *nirvana*, King *Bhagiratha* performed a *Ghor Tapsya* in the Himalayas to bring Ganga to Earth.

When the story of eight *vasus* (Aapa, Dhruva, Soma, Dhara, Anila, Anala, Prathyusha, and Prabhasa) comes into role there is a portrayal of how they are released of their *karmas* after immersing in Ganga. The story tradition mentions Nandini, a wish-fulfilling cow and the daughter of the divine Kamadhenu, who was sent to the renowned Rishi Vasishtha's ashram to assist him with his prayers and to look after his guests. Eight *vasus*, or minor gods, enjoyed Nandini's hospitality at Vasishtha's ashram one day and returned to tell their wives about her. The ladies quickly emanded their spouses capture Nandini and bring her to them. One of the eight *vasus*, Prabhasa, gained the lead. He stole the cow and then told the other cows to leave the ashram. When Vasishtha learned of the robbery using his yogic powers, he grew enraged and cursed the eight *vasus*. "You will all take birth as mortals on earth as the punishment for your actions! he thundered". (Murty) Vasus apologized and asked for forgiveness, he didn't take his words back rather he brought the curse down. May you all be born out of the holy River Ganga and be immersed in her immediately after birth. Then your sins will be cleansed. But Prabhasa, who stole Nandini, will remain on earth for a much longer time, who was later known as *Deverata Bhishma* or *Pitamah*. It shows Ganga's purity and divinity that their curse be vanished after taking a dip in it.

All the Indian rivers shows feminine attributes as Ganga does. (Sati) The Ganga is known for *snaan* (holy bath), the Yamuna is known for *achman* (intake of a ship of water before a puja), the Narmada is for *darshan* (the meeting of a devotee of Hinduism with

the holy Narmada), and the Tapti for *smaran* (Remembrance).

Ganga has had a significant impact on Indian history as a sin-cleansing Goddess for humanity. Ganga does, in fact, undergo self-purification. It demonstrates the independence that today's modern women exhibits because it not only purifies humankind but also oneself like a woman is metaphorically said of twelve hands fulfilling all her duties keeping in mind her own ambitions as well. Producers Siddharth and Rahul Tewary depict Ganga right from in start of the Mahabharata, as a persona, wearing a white saree, symbolises the calmness and beauty of the natural world.

Ganga clearly demonstrates her intention before marrying *Shantanu* in *The Maiden of the River*, that he would not question her on anything, but as he did, she departs.

"*Shantanu* met Ganga again, now in her human form, and became enchanted by her beauty. She agreed to marry him on the condition that he must never question her actions. Deeply in love with her, *Shantanu* accepted this condition. In time, she gave birth to seven children, whom she immersed in water after they were born. On the birth of the eighth child, *Shantanu* questioned her, fearing the fate of the new-born. This questioning broke the condition upon which Ganga had agreed to marry *Shantanu*. She abandoned him but left the eighth child with him—this child was none other than the glorious *Bhishma*". (Murty)

As soon as she leaves, desertion of Mahabharata comes into play. Additionally, by killing her children, Ganga, in the role of a mother, demonstrates his intention to release those kids from their *karma*. This was also from mythological relevance to let the prophecy come true of *Mahabhisha*. "Ganga is also instructed to follow *Mahabhisha* to Earth and ensure that she breaks *Mahabhisha's* heart before returning to *Swarga*. From here begins the tale of one of the greatest epics in Indian mythology." (Vidya Shankar Shetty)

From a perception of mythology, women are depicted as submissive to men, but when it comes time to assert their independence or defend themselves, they turn revolutionary. As a revolutionary, woman transforms into *Durga*, *Kali*, or *Sita*, after she gives an *agni-pariksha* and descends to the ground.

CONCLUSION

Ganga is portrayed by The Maiden of the River as a lover, mother, and acculturator of civilization. Whether or not one has continued to believe in her, she has been a companion to people in the form of

Amrit. She has paid a great price by immersing in cremation and dead bodies. The matter fact, she has been a blessing to mankind with her many strengths and virtues, considering herself as a mother to society. She has never complained, but rather can be seen as an independent person who is moving toward her destination and fulfilling her responsibility to humanity. Sudha Murty in her unique style has personified Ganga a feminine identity who is symbolised to have come into existence for the purification and salvation of mankind. Murty's depiction of Ganga opens doors for a lot of research on the mystifying elements related to the Ganga waters and the quality of elixir like properties in her waters. Ganga is not only mythical but also a body of water that grants life to people from one generation to another. Murty represents Ganga as one whose motherhood qualities add redemptive powers to individuals and society at large. Through the exploration of Ganga's origin in Sudha Murty's work, this paper explores the trajectory of Ganga and the meaning that she holds in the lives of the people of India. She is the lone bearer of all sufferings, happiness, religious rites and rituals and continues to inspire the belief in people that she is the one solely responsible for their redemption. Various representations in films, folklores, mythical stories and narratives have described her as possessing healing powers and this paper strongly reiterates the fact that in representing Ganga as a redeemer, Murty justifies the fact that Ganga's feminine identity enables her to act as a mother to the teeming millions whose devotion towards her leads to the final redemption of the human soul.

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